

SÉMAPHOR

N°13 - FEBRUARY 2002

THE NEWSLETTER OF LE VIEUX TÉLÉGRAPHE, DOMAINE LA ROQUETTE AND DOMAINE LES PALLIÈRES



ON THE WINGS OF PLEASURE

In this period of huge uncertainty, when people everywhere are twitchy and wondering what tomorrow has in store, I've been surprised on more than one occasion to hear a voice running through my head – a voiceover, in fact, from an old TV ad for ham, I think, which went: "...ne passons pas à coté des choses simples", let's not forget the simple things. The message could have been: we shouldn't deprive ourselves of the pleasures each day brings. These simple pleasures, so essential to our personal happiness and so different for each one of us, must not be sacrificed on the altar of anxiety. These simple moments are a great help in giving us the detachment we need to cope with situations whose complexities are beyond us. So let's not be ashamed of the word 'pleasure', for it hasn't yet been banned – on the contrary, in many cases it may well be the remedy to the ills of a world that is too sophisticated, too fast, too modern... a world where the packaging matters more than what's inside. And what if real pleasure lay simply in opening our eyes wider, looking straight inside, going against the grain occasionally to change the way we see things, and making the most of all the people and all the things around us. Never, it seems to me, has wine been such a catalyst of pleasure – a popped cork can, assuredly, usher in a precious moment of closeness, tranquillity and calm! People who have yet to discover wine must miss it terribly!

Daniel Brunier

The 2001 vintage

Let's travel back a year or so in time, to autumn 2000, to the source of the vintage in question. Rarely has a wet spell lasted so long in the southern Rhône Valley. Rain fell regularly and heavily from 15th October until Christmas – 400mm in total, 70% of our annual allowance in the space of just two-and-a-half months. Our winter groundwork, you can imagine, was seriously delayed, but to console ourselves we thought of the reserves of water being built up for the 2001 harvest. The rain hung around more or less all winter long, amid relatively mild temperatures, with a February finale of heavy, slushy snow – in short, enough water for a high-class terroir to nurture the grapes to ripeness even if the summer turned out to be very dry. Spring was fairly typical, though somewhat dry; as in the winter, temperatures were above average, and stayed that way until flowering (31st May). Just then, a very hot patch of weather came our way, only to leave us a few days later. The heat returned on 21st June, heralding a summer the way we love them. But the vine blossom, especially on the Grenache vines, doesn't like sudden fluctuations in temperature; and winemakers like us, whose quality derives from a high proportion of old vines, got yet another harsh reminder. It took just a few fickle days, in the middle of the flowering period, to finish off 15-20% of the crop before it was even created. A heck of a blow! The summer, for its part, was simply gorgeous, through to the eve of the harvest. Picking began very early, given the great summertime heat, the sufficient water in the soil and the small potential crop. On 3rd September, we cut the first white grapes in the Châteauneuf AOC; then on the 27th, the first Grenache over in Gigondas; and the harvest ended on 10th October with the Mourvèdre grapes at Les Pallières. We had a long stretch of fine weather, interrupted only twice, on 23rd and 29th September, by rains of no importance.

In the southern Rhône, then, we have a vintage that's low on quantity but with plenty of character and concentration in the wines from terroirs that withstood the dry weather, while the others are somewhat imbalanced. In the Châteauneuf and Gigondas AOCs, the same comments apply: the average yield is about 30hl/ha, and the fine terroirs were rewarded. At Le Vieux Télégraphe and La Roquette the

result is quite superb – we find it hard to credit that Mother Nature has given us a fourth great vintage on the run. The Syrah cuvées are abundantly fruity and fresh, and give off a feeling of closely-textured, concentrated appeal. The Mourvèdres are silky, profound, powerful, with firm tannins that are likely to gain in strength all through the winter. The Grenaches, though the colour is a shade short on intensity, are the real thing: pure, liquorice-laced, powerful and elegant, with conspicuous tannin. The young vines have also provided lots of fruit and freshness; the blends are far from being finalised, of course, but the vintage has the potential to make good first and second wines.

The foundations of the Châteauneuf-du-Pape whites are also of great interest: fruit, minerals, floral notes, concentration, richness, and freshness on the finish. Everything is in place to do as well if not better than in 2000.

...the fine terroirs were rewarded...

One particular detail stood out: the four grape varieties came to maturity at the same moment, in such harmony that they were harvested together and, of course, vinified together. This, to us, augurs well for complexity and balance. Events at Les Pallières followed a near-perfect course: there was a very small crop, which ripened in perfect health under clement skies. This prompted us to take our time and put even more effort into coaxing out the balance and personality of Les Pallières' wines during the production process. The result is fairly strong and concentrated but not austere, with no hint of excess; the black fruit is very pronounced, and the wine leaves a final impression of serious structure, full of character and minerals. Thanks to especially favourable weather conditions, we have improved a little further on 2000, mainly in terms of balance and nobility. It's been an incredible stroke of luck to have been able to experiment with Les Pallières' terroir for four consecutive years. This experience will be of capital importance as we define directions for the future. As for Le Pigeolet, our *vin de pays*, to coincide with the 2001 vintage we invite you overleaf for a full and detailed review.

**Sémaphore*: n. (from *sema-* and *-phore*). In days gone by, an arm-waving transmitter of Claude Chappe's aerial telegraphy.

What's new in the cellar at Les Pallières?

The 'stock-take' we carried out on our arrival revealed incredible riches – in terms of the respectful treatment of the estate's terroir and environment, and of the terroir itself (soil, microclimate, exposure, grape varieties) – but also obvious weaknesses in the cellars and vat room.

We were able to pinpoint quickly and fairly easily the immediate needs with regard to working the fresh crops, storing the wines in bottle, the whole bottling set-up, and the way orders are prepared; there was little or nothing in place. Our aim, which we achieved with the very first harvest, was to put into practice our basic blending philosophy; to age the wine in wood to good effect, respecting and assisting its maturation; and to bottle all of it in one go, to ensure the consistency of the product we took to market.

In parallel with the management of the finished wines, we reviewed the vinification methods and, with each vintage, did a few experiments and tested a few theories – little by little, this enabled us to put together an operational framework that would prevent as far as possible the mistakes we might make along the way. We studied what happened when we didn't destem the grapes, when we punched the cap, with the vatting times that vary with each variety, with the different ways of filling the vats, and the influence of must and fermentation temperature; and we noted how the grapes reacted to the different shapes and quality of the vats. All these experiments – and plenty of others, often conducted quite accidentally – have now shown us, give or take a few details, the path that lies ahead at Les Pallières. Here as

elsewhere, the crux of the matter is: which family of wine do we want to belong to, and which philosophy do we want to embrace? To our mind, the question did not need pondering: the results of our experiments will help us to guide Les Pallières' wine towards being a vin de terroir for which balance and elegance are just as important as richness, tannic structure or concentration – it will be a wine for the table rather than one for tasting, a wine that will earn our gratitude more by the pleasure it gives than by the marks it scores.

We had announced that a vat room would be built for the 2002 vintage, to help us act on our observations in greater detail. We have decided to put this project off for a year, and give ourselves a fifth and final crop to try and answer our last remaining questions.

PIGEOULET 2001

And now a brief refresher course on this Vin de Pays, which is made according to a distinctly French philosophy: the concept of the AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée).

The Pigeoulet red comes partly from land outside the boundaries of the Côtes du Rhône AOC (three hectares south of Châteauneuf) and partly from the Côtes du Ventoux AOC (seven hectares in the commune of Caromb). We decided not to adopt this label, and to simply retain the idea of it being a local wine more attached to its grape varieties, its climate and its makers than to its terroir and time-honoured rules; it would have the freshness of a happy-go-lucky wine, more for quaffing than tasting, a thirst-quencher accessible to all. It is made mostly from Grenache, blended with a small proportion of Cinsault, Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon; and it is vinified, aged and bottled at Domaine La Roquette.

Since it was created, several steps have been made to enhance its quality, and in 2001 another milestone was passed: all the grapes in the Pigeoulet vineyards were picked by hand. This called for an extra organisational effort, but brought us so much pleasure and satisfaction at harvest time. Indeed we have completely erased the machines' influence on the bunches. The grapes from Caromb now travel to the winery in excellent conditions, and we have all the time we need to take out those we don't like the look of. We're very confident that these three factors will exert a strong influence on the final quality.



With the 2001 vintage, nature was so bountiful that it will be hard to know very clearly what's behind the progress we expect. The fruits are very fresh on the nose, while liquorice is the dominant flavour on the palate; there's a velvety feel that's unusual for Le Pigeoulet. Creamy, clean and long on the finish. We tend to think that the fruits and texture are more refined and clearly crafted than in previous vintages. We sense there are some very interesting things going on, which only the future can confirm.

“LA TAPENADE” OLIVE CAVIAR BY MAGUY

- 1 KG PLUMP BLACK OLIVES
- 1 SMALL JAR OF CAPERS (ABOUT 50G, DRAINED AND RINSED)
- 8 ANCHOVY FILLETS IN OIL
- OLIVE OIL — PEPPER — GROUND ALMONDS (OPTIONAL)

STONE THE OLIVES, AND BLEND TO A FINE CONSISTENCY.(1) BLEND THE ANCHOVIES AND RINSED

CAPERS, THEN MIX WITH THE OLIVES TO MAKE A SMOOTH PASTE. ADD ONE OR TWO SOUPOONS OF OLIVE OIL, AND ONE SOUPOON OF GROUND ALMONDS. MIX WELL.

BEST SERVED WITH TOAST FINGERS WITH APERITIF DRINKS, BUT ALSO IN A GREEN SALAD OR TOMATO SALAD, ETC...

(1) THE WAY THE INGREDIENTS ARE MIXED DEFINES THEIR TASTE AND TEXTURE. THE PASTE SHOULD STICK TOGETHER AND SPREAD EASILY, WITHOUT BEING COMPLETELY PUREED.

SÉMAPHORE

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LA REVUE DU VIN DE FRANCE

First tasting / Châteauneuf-du-Pape 99 & 98 / 1999, a vintage that will make a name for itself - DEC 01- JAN 02

Granted, the size of the appellation (...) means quality here will never be admirably consistent. Granted, the different areas and terroirs (...) and the different climates also help to explain the huge variety of styles. But one suspects that many producers need to pull their socks up (...) Because at its best, Châteauneuf possesses an extra touch of depth, of aromatic complexity, of silky muscle and maybe soul, which make it far superior to any other wine in the region. Our tastings demonstrated that this potential could be happily exploited by very different blends and styles. There is little in common between the forceful full body of a Marcoux and the depth of a Vieux Télégraphe, nor between a vibrant Beaucastel and the mellow charm of a Font de Michelle, except that all these wines are perfect illustrations of the greatness of Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

Vieux Télégraphe red 1999 *****

The robe is dark garnet-red and very opaque. On the nose, powerful notes of thyme and fine spices. The palate is very elegant, mellow and well-rounded with impressive depth. This is a long, voluptuous wine, with a very long, spicy finish. Best from 2007 to 2015.

Roquette red 1999 *(*)**

The robe is of medium depth. The nose is refined, with notes of subtle spices and of plums and cherries. Generous and rounded on the palate, it has smooth tannins combined with a generous alcohol content. A pleasant finish of spiced fruit. Highly enjoyable overall, but it doesn't have the density of the 1998 from this estate.

WINE ADVOCATE

The Rhone Valley - the South - 21 DEC 2001

Pallières 2000 / Pallières 99 The enthusiasm shown by most Rhône wine lovers when this estate was purchased by importer Kermit Lynch and the well-known

proprietors of Vieux Télégraphe, Daniel et Frédéric Brunier, was put to the test given the lacklustre performance of Les Pallières' 1998. However, Brunier and his team did not control the viticulture or the vinification until 1999. The results in 1999 and 2000 recall this estate's great offerings of the early eighties and late seventies. Readers familiar with Les Pallières' terroir know this is a cool climate Gigondas vineyard with poor soil. (...) Made from 80% Grenache, 15% Syrah, and 5% Mourvèdre kept in foudre (14.3% alcohol achieved naturally), the 1999 Gigondas is an elegant, perfumed, dark ruby-colored effort with full body, sweet tannin, and a layered, velvety texture. Notes of Smoked herbs, black cherries, kirsch liqueur, and minerals are found in the beautiful wine, one of the finest of the vintage. It should drink well for 10-12 years. Even more impressive with additional layers, glycerin, extract and richness is the 2000 Gigondas. Over half of the cuvee achieved 15% natural alcohol. Boasting a deep ruby/purple color, a gorgeous perfume of blackberry and cherry fruit, minerals, and subtle garrigue scents, low acidity, full body, and exceptional purity, the 2000 is the finest wine produced at this estate since 1979 and 1981. It will drink well for 10-15 years. Bravo !

Vieux Télégraphe Blanc 2000 Most of white Châteauneuf-du-Pape offer little excitement, but the 2000 Vieux Télégraphe blanc exhibits plenty of peach, honaysuckle, and orange notes.

WINE SPECTATOR

Spectator selection - 15 DEC 2001

Vieux Télégraphe Rouge La Crau 1999

Beautiful Rhône red. Full-bodied, rich and ripe, with plum and blackberry notes and some real tannic grip. Mineral edge adds complexity to this impressive Châteauneuf. Built for the cellar. Best from 2003 through 2010. 16.665 cases made.

**GUIDE BETTANE & DESSEAUVÉ - 2002
 Domaine La Roquette - 2000 White & 1999 Red**

This estate, situated in the centre of the village of Châteauneuf-du-Pape (with most of the vines on the Piélong plateau and in the sandier soils of the Pignan district, has belonged to the Brunier family since 1986 and has been making progress ever since. The wines made here, predominantly from Grenache grapes, have in recent vintages appeared splendidly built, with a conspicuous fleshy quality that gives immediate flavour, and a long, silky tannic structure. The Bruniers also make a commendable white Châteauneuf (...) The 1999 is also dense and full-bodied, though with tannins a shade less melting and silky than its predecessor. The 2000 white is fruity and refined, and will soon make for very pleasant drinking.

DECANTER

Compte-rendu Review of the Wine Encounter - NOV 2001

Best wine: Les Pallières Red 1999 *****

- a premium quality Gigondas - will keep for 5 years. Les Pallières is the largest and most historical estate in southern Rhône's Gigondas appellation. The Brunier family of Vieux Télégraphe took over the domaine in 1998. With Les Pallières the Bruniers are making some of the finest wine in Gigondas. Their 1999 reveals a good complexity of a berry-scented nose with some spice. The palate is rich and generously fruity with ripe tannin. It is drinking well now but will age for at least 5 years.

